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ABSTRACT

One of the reasons for the rapid advancement of literacy activities in Ethiopia is that different nationalities learn in their own mother tongues in their own cultures. The literacy rate before the 1974 revolution was 7 percent. The 1990 literacy rate is 75 percent. Literacy instructors in the current literacy campaign do more than instruct learners. They also create awareness, register the learners, put them in groups and start instruction. Criteria for selection of instructors include knowledge of objectives of the social changes taking place in Ethiopia, knowledge of the language of a particular region, cultural knowledge of the people in the region, physical fitness, age, and being unmarried and without children. Instructors are trained in a maximum of 10 days in courses on instructional methods, health education, agriculture, horticulture, political education, and adult psychology. Prepared instructors depart ceremoniously for their learning centers. The motto for organizing learning centers is "anywhere is a school." The following activities have been shown to help change learners' attitudes: instructors' interaction with learners, exchanges of experiences, discussions, dialogue, question and answer sessions, conferences, meetings, workshops, demonstrations, and exhibitions. Illiterate people who resisted going to literacy centers have come to enjoy them, are aware of health hazards, are more analytical, and are more punctual. The policy on lifelong learning includes employing teachers from the community. (CML)

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LITERACY LESSONS

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INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

Ethiopia: the role of literacy instructors in changing attitudes

by Gudeta Mammo

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION

The population of Ethiopia, according to the census of 1984, was 42 million, of which about 89% are living in rural areas. About ninety languages are spoken by different nationalities. Amharic is the official language of administration and the medium of instruction in primary schools throughout the country. However, the National Literacy Campaign uses fifteen different languages in literacy instruction. One of the reasons for the rapid advancement of literacy activities in this campaign is that different nationalities learn in their own mother tongues in their own culture.

A number of literacy projects were started in Ethiopia before the popular revolution of 1974. Very few of these projects were effective, and they were organized in a piece-meal traditional approach. Mostly, these programmes were attached to church and Koranic schools whose methods of instruction were traditional. Other literacy projects which were organized on a large scale, with the characteristics of campaigns, were ineffective because the approach lacked the involvement and participation of the community in mobilizing human, financial and material resources. As these literacy attempts were ineffective, the end result, by and large, was a 7% literacy rate at the time of the revolution.

However, the last ten years have seen remarkable achievement. Since the launching of the National Literacy Campaign in July 1979, 22 million adults participated in literacy programmes, of whom 19 million have acquired literacy certificates. As a result, the illiteracy rate has been dropped dramatically to below 25%.

The purpose of literacy campaigns is to provide the means of positive change in the lives of the people. To achieve full benefits from literacy actions, attitudes

must change so that the new skills and knowledge can be most effectively used.

The role of literacy instructors in these processes, and the way in which they carry out their tasks is crucial. A continuing dialogue between those who are engaged in the creation of literate societies is necessary so that we can all draw inspiration from successful experience. The central purpose of this paper is to examine impacts of this kind, specifically through the description of the role of instructors in the National Literacy Campaign of Ethiopia.

Among the literacy programmes initiated in Ethiopia before the revolution, the Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Project (WOALP) provided broad concrete experience for literacy work. Supported by an inter-agency group, it was closely linked with development. The project trained national counter-parts, supervisors, and trainers of literacy teachers in the new approach and techniques of functional literacy.

The nation-wide development campaign known as 'Development Through Cooperation and Work Enlightment Campaign', which was began in 1975, benefited from the experience of WOALP especially in the preparation of instructional materials. This campaign mobilized about 60,000 secondary and university students, teachers, other civilians and soldiers for comprehensive rural development. The scope of this campaign programme included literacy work, land reform, soil conservation, health education, organization of Peasants' Associations, Youth Associations, Women's Associations and Urban Dwellers' Associations. This initial campaign opened the eyes of the rural people as well as the urban poor to a larger understanding of their rights and privileges. However, one of the drawbacks of this programme was that little training was offered to the campaigners. Nevertheless, it succeeded in changing various aspects and attitudes of the rural and urban communities.

Literacy instructors in a campaign not only give instruction to the learners, but they also create awareness, register the learners, put them in groups and start instruction. In performing these activities, the instructors discuss different points of the campaign programme and get to know one another.

Before instructors undertake these roles, they undergo selection and training. The following activities illustrate the Ethiopian experience in preparing and organizing for the campaign.

Selection and training

The criteria for selection of candidates for literacy instructors include the following: knowledge of objectives of social changes taking place in Ethiopia; knowledge of the nationality language of a particular region; cultural knowledge of the people in a particular region; physical fitness; age; unmarried and without children. The candidates who qualify take brief courses in methods of teaching literacy.

- *Who are the trainees?*

The National Literacy Campaign draws its instructors from several categories. The main source of instructors, of course, are students who have completed their grade twelve studies. Other sources of instructors are regular teachers, soldiers, the police and retired civilians.

- *Medical check-up*

After selection has been made, each literacy instructor has a medical check-up. If he is proved healthy, he is issued campaign materials such as clothing, shoes and rain cape to be ready for the campaign.

- *Courses provided to literacy instructors*

Duration of training depends on the availability of resources. In most cases ten days is the maximum.

Training courses are offered in methods of instruction for literacy, health education, agriculture, horticulture, political education and adult psychology.

The trainers of these subjects come from a pool of subject specialists from different ministries and govern-

ment organizations. In some courses, for example health education, subject specialists use films and slides for teaching about health problems. Instructors are also trained in how to prepare teaching aids from local materials, how to set up a 'reading-room', and start a local 'news sheet'.

Send-off and receiving ceremonies for literacy instructors
The departure of instructors to a region from their original place in a fascinating scene. As soon as preparations for the campaign are over, a ceremonial send-off of the literacy instructors is organized at the various points of departure. Campaign officials, relatives and friends come to the ceremonial place to wave good-bye. Media people from radio, television and the press bustle about with cameramen. To enliven the ceremony, band music is played on tapes. Slogans such as 'The educated teach the uneducated', 'Let the uneducated learn' and 'We are determined to eradicate illiteracy' are repeatedly chanted by the campaigners and enthusiastic spectators. The send-off cermony strengthens the fervor of the instructors, who feel as if they are going for an adventure in the rural areas.

At their destination, a large crowd awaits these 'heroes of the literacy campaign'. Reception officials from different organizations and community elders, with crowds of people from the community, bid them welcome. Speeches are made, including one by a representative of the instructors, often a female as an example and encouragement for the rural women. The gist of the instructor's talk explains the goals of their mission.

- *Registration of literacy learners.* The day after their arrival, the instructors register all the illiterates in the community, noting male, female and children. The main criterion for literacy registration is age, that is, the

7 to 50 year age group have priority. When the registration is over, learning centres are agreed, a timetable is drawn up and class groupings are made. After the lists of participants have been made, instructors distribute learning materials such as primers, pencils, exercise-books and erasers to those participants who cannot afford to buy them. Male adults attend literacy centres in the morning and women learners attend in the late morning. The children attend in the afternoon. In some areas, where light is available, literacy classes are held in the evenings for male adults.

- *Launching the Literacy Campaign.* When launching the literacy campaign in a designated area, every 'round' is a spectacular landmark of the campaign movement. Announcements are made over the national media – radio, television and the press. The campaign is launched on the same day all over the country.

- *Who runs literacy centres?* A literacy centre 'head' is selected by the instructors. He is responsible for the administration of the centre. He coordinates the work of sub-centres, sees that instructors carry out their duties, and attends meetings with the Literacy Committee of various associations, as the case may be. The literacy centre 'head' is like a formal school director. He manages the office, receives visitors, keeps general records of the centre and, at the end of the 'Round', makes a report from the centre. Although all literacy campaign activities represent work experiences to the instructors, this centre activity contributes a more lasting experience. In this way, as we say, 'Instructors teach the people, and at the same time learn from the people'.

In these processes, how do literacy instructors change cultural, political and economic attitudes? By the virtue of their roles, literacy instructors are considered as change 'agents' and as leaders in the teaching-and-learning processes. It is not an easy task to obtain immediate results from these activities. Continuous and consistent interactions and intercommunication with the learners can modify their ways of thinking, feeling, and looking at things.

- *Literacy instructors at the centres.* The role of instructors at the centre does not stop with teaching. They also perform a number of other activities related to literacy. Instructors give drill exercises in the subjects they have taught. These daily exercises account for 75% of the final test. The reason is to emphasize learning through daily practice than relying on the final test results. The instructors introduce the learners to the ideas of using a 'reading room', and listening to educational radio. Moreover, when adults work in the field, instructors join in to assist them. This participation creates an atmosphere of friendship toward the instructors. Here through their roles, instructors develop attitudes of friendship, co-operation, love and sympathy.

At the end of the 'Round' instructors give a final test, and grade it for certification. Those who pass will be grouped in the post-literacy programme, and those who fail will be grouped in a 'remedial' programme.

Another very important duty of the instructors is to train literacy instructors to replace them in order to carry on the literacy work in the community. This smooth transition from visitors to local instructors has helped the continuity of literacy campaign. Before leaving, the instructors, with the co-operation of the local literacy committee, organize a certification ceremony in which the newly literate receive their certificates. Outstanding achievements are rewarded.

- *Caterogies of literacy learners.* In the National Literacy Campaign of Ethiopia there are two categories of learners—children and adults. The children, age 7 to 10, have not had the opportunity to go to formal school. Great enthusiasm and eagerness have been observed among these children in attending literacy classes. Their learning pace is also encouraging. It has been observed, among these children, that they learn reading faster than writing and arithmetic. On the other hand, adults learn writing and arithmetic faster than reading. The reason appears to be that children's muscular movements have not yet developed as well as adults'. Adults have experience in using arithmetic in their daily life. As far as reading skill is concerned, the reason is not clear. In addition to literacy skills, these children, under the instructors' guidance and influence, have developed a sense of time, punctuality, and in the majority, a habit of coming to literacy centres clean and tidy.

As literacy campaign targets, adults are unlike children in many ways. Adults have already developed mature behaviour, attitudes and personality when they come to the literacy centres. They are responsible people able to manage their own personal affairs. They are responsible for the care of their offspring and home affairs. What adults really lack is literacy. Because of this, life is not complete and they have no access to the world of knowledge. They come and learn literacy because they have expectations and aspirations. What are these expectations and aspirations? How do they fulfil these desires? Can literacy instructors, through their roles, help them?

It is useless to train instructors and send them to rural areas without facilitating the learning and teaching environment in which they will work. In literacy campaigns the atmosphere of instruction should be such that it reflects the real life of the community. Space or seats should not be a problem in literacy instruction. Learners can sit on the ground, on stones, on wooden logs etc. The organization of literacy centres, then, should utilize conditions familiar to the community and not just the requirements of the campaign officials and instructors. There must be a sharing of responsibilities to facilitate the arrangements in the centres and a feeling of co-operation and encouragement for learning and teaching. The motto for organizing learning centres is 'anywhere is a school'. The following have been used as learning centres in the campaign: schools, assembly halls, verandahs, large office corridors, churchyards, mosque compounds, community skills training, centers (CSTCs), Awaraja pedagogical centers (APCs), or even in the open air under shade trees.

One of the interesting facts about the National Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia is that different organizations, both government and non-government, and training institutes showed considerable co-operation in providing space and furniture for the implementation of the campaign.

What factors change attitudes in a literacy campaign?

In general, it could be said that the process of instruction described in the preceding paragraphs could change individuals' mental activities. Are these changes direct or indirect? Do the changes occur consciously or unconsciously?

Educational psychologists and anthropologists both agree that attitudes and culture are behaviours learned directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. They also agree that attitudes and culture are subject to modifications and changes. Of course, these changes do not occur in a vacuum.

Activities must be generated to bring about modifications and changes of attitudes. The following activities in literacy instruction have been shown to have an effect in changing attitudes, and in increasing capacity to bring about change: instructors' interactions with literacy learners, exchanges of experiences, discussions, dialogue, question and answers sessions, conferences, meetings, workshops, demonstrations and exhibitions.

It is the hope that changes for a better life and for better future progress and development will occur and that positive attitudes will develop. This has been the central goal of literacy instructors in the National Literacy Campaign of Ethiopia and everywhere in the world.

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What does literacy mean to a neo-literate?

As a result of literacy instruction, neo-literates have expressed the following conceptions of literacy.

- Literacy is an eye-opener;
- Literacy learning is receiving light;
- A literate person has social respect;
- Literacy gives me self-confidence when I can read shop labels, shop prices, and newspapers;
- I am greatly satisfied when I write my own letter to friends and when I am able to read the letters they send me;
- My husband has a special regard for me since I became literate;
- When I was asked to become literate, I though that I would learn it for somebody else, but now I have realized that it is for myself.

Literacy accelerates changing attitudes

Attitudes are acquired and accelerated through reading. Thus reading materials should deal with different life situations so that they reflect the needs of adults. In considering attitudes, we must look at their origins and how they are acquired.

Attitude formation, positive or negative, starts at home, in school and in the general surroundings. At home parents and other members of the family have an immense influence. The school teachers, in this case literacy instructors, can have still greater influence. On the whole, the impact of environmental (rural or urban) conditions contributes a great deal to the type of attitudes one acquires. These acquired attitudes can be modified or changed, temporarily or permanently. If the intensity of one influence is greater than the preceding one, then the former loses its effect and the latter will take its place.

Culture, like attitudes, is acquired from parents and other groups in the local society within which interaction takes place. Anthropologists say that 'culture is a prerequisite for behaviour formation'. They state also that 'customs are the bases of culture, as there is no person without customs and culture'.

Such attitudes and culture are learned elements, they are subject to change under different situations such as the result of becoming literate. Interactions and interpersonal relations of the instructors can change the cultural, social and political attitudes of the learners. As observed in the campaign, the following attitudes changed after the learners became literate.

- Illiterates who resisted going to literacy centers have come to enjoy going to literacy centres.
- Those who became literate have developed a positive feeling for more learning.
- Illiterates who were oblivious to health hazards have become sensitive to them.

- Women who were reluctant to talk in public meetings have become more outspoken, as a result of seeing and working with female instructors.
- Illiterates who were unpunctual have become more punctual after attending literacy centres.
- Illiterates have become more analytical and critical.

- A change of attitudes is visible in many situations. In urban and rural areas there is much demand for the use of literacy for practical purposes. In the past, there was a feeling of shame among factory workers, office boys and watchmen who used their thumbs for signature. These neo-literates now sign their names. Policy encouragement has been given by the government in many cases. If promotions or new employment are available in job categories such as watchmen, cleaners and office boys, the employee must be a literate person. Nominations for elections in mass organizations such as the Urban Dwellers', Peasants', Youth and Women's Associations use literacy as one of their first criteria. As the result of the literacy instructors' work, this change has now emerged as part of government policy.

NEW POLICIES FOR LIFELONG EDUCATION

Literacy is of little value unless it is sustained and developed so that people can use these skills in everyday life. Neo-literate people are in search of knowledge beyond the basic skills of reading and writing. This requires new strategies which will get the community more involved in continuing learning. The campaign strategy which has been employed for ten years has contributed wide experience in mobilizing man-power,

financial and material resources. In order to develop community-based lifelong education, the National Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee (NLCCC) and the Ministry of Education felt it most appropriate to draw up a new policy to employ teachers from the community on a regular basis.

The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia is conscious of both the promise and the challenge of literacy to the nation, and has made this aware to all working in the field, as the following extract from the National Literacy Campaign material shows:

> *The consolidation of a literate society is not just a question of providing classes and courses and teachers. There must be the broadest possible foundation in which the community as a whole is involved in movement towards new cultural objectives in community affairs, in the workplace, in the marketplace and in the home. Opportunities must be provided in the community and encouragement given to those whose literacy skills are weak, and who could easily relapse into illiteracy. As a whole, the community must move towards the position in which reading and writing and calculations in written form become a norm of life. At the same time the community must see that there are expanding horizons for those whose literate ability, linked to broader capacities, can be usefully engaged in continuing learning, and in the acquisition of new specific skills and knowledge required for community development.*
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> *However, all these efforts, if effectively promoted, will bring with them a great expansion in material needs. A literate society cannot function without paper, without reading matter and without learning materials. The challenge is great. Ethiopia currently has one of the lowest figures for per capital consumption of cultural paper in the world. Setting the scene for a rapid and significant change in this situation is a major concern of the NLCCC and the Ministry of Education.*

It is to be hoped that this difficult situation might be relieved through a Unesco, UNICEF, UNDP and World Bank joint worldwide education initiative. The common goals of this project 'Education for all' are to review the present problem in meeting basic education needs and explore realistic strategies for rapid expansion.

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The International Bureau of Education acknowledges with grateful thanks this contribution by Gudeta Mammo to the cause of Literacy. Mr Mammo has recently retired from the Department of Adult Education in the Co-ordinating Office of the Ethiopian Literacy Campaign.

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